

Special Article

HISTORY OF PROSTITUTION*

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Prostitution forms an age-worn but interesting chapter in the history of civilization and presents an important problem for modern society. All civilized countries have offered solutions, none of which are satisfactory, and only a few of them have even modified its baneful influence.

We commonly speak of prostitution as being the oldest of the professions, but in the light of historical investigation, this is hardly in keeping with the truth. The prehistoric period can, of course, supply us with little accurate knowledge. The earliest human records, about 4000 B.C., make reference to it, but for anything of value, we must turn to comparative ethnology, where the customs of primitive peoples throw considerable light on the early stages. There seems no evidence that the elemental sex instinct, "the ever-raging animal in man", as Plato called it, has been altered in the slightest degree by all the centuries of culture and education. The advancing development of mankind in early times, brought sex attraction into close conjunction with the religious impulse, and upon this basis sprang up a free sexual life, which along with the social life, has continued to our own day.

"The Profession of prostitution," says Parent-Duchatelet (1836), "is an evil of all times and all countries, and appears to be innate in the social structure of mankind. It will perhaps never be entirely eradicated; still all the more must we strive to limit its extent and its dangers. With prostitution itself, as with vice, crime and disease, the teacher of morals endeavours to prevent the vices, the lawgiver to prevent the crime and the physician to cure the disease. All alike know that they will never fully attain their goal; but they pursue their work none the less, in the conviction that he who does only a little good, yet does a great service to the weak man."

Let us first consider the definition of a prostitute. Rey (1851) describes her as a woman who allows the use of her body by any man, without distinction, for a payment, made or expected. Havelock Ellis says practically the same thing—"One who openly abandons her body to a number of men, without choice, for money." Both descriptions emphasize the fact that it is not the abundance of lovers which makes a woman a harlot, but the nature of her relationship with them,—"the sale of the sweet name of love." In the suppression of individual inclinations she differs from a mistress,

a concubine or a polygamous wife. The Roman jurists held that the fee had nothing to do with prostitution. It was the mingling of the sexes, the lack of an individual bond between man and woman and the universal and unrestrained gratification of sex passion that were its essential features. The fee is always *contra bonos mores* and not legally collectable. The mercenary side, so prominent today, is a secondary factor, resulting from the development of civilization. Remuneration is only an inevitable corollary of the consideration that a wife is the property of a man and therefore of definite value.

The origin of prostitution is closely connected with the rise of brothels and the development of the system of free love. No longer do all the girls, but only a certain few, offer themselves to the frequenters of "houses for men". These few generally live in selected domiciles and are paid for their sex services. The "common woman" also offers herself to strangers and travellers, and this may be the origin of the "hospitable prostitute".

In Africa, through the influence of slavery, practically all prostitutes were slaves. A young woman was bought, sheltered in a special hut and required to offer herself to anyone in return for a small present, the owner of the slave receiving the earnings. In Dahomey, the King was the proprietor of all these women,—a case of "government control". In ancient Egypt, Arabia and Israel the courtesan was recruited from divorced and cast-off wives who wandered about from place to place.

A study of racial development shows that prostitution exists among all aboriginal peoples where sexual intercourse is restricted or restrained, and that it is nothing more than a new form for the primitive mingling of the races. In its entire history it is a derivative from the free sexual life of primeval man. As Schurtz says "In all places where free love is separated from passions and their satisfaction prostitution is found".

It seems quite probable that prostitution had its beginning in a religious custom. Religion, to quote Havelock Ellis, is ever "the great conservator of social traditions, preserving in a transformed shape a primitive freedom that was passing out of general social life". Religious prostitution seems to have been associated with the idea that the generative activity of human beings possessed a mysterious and sacred influence in promoting the fertility of nature generally. In the earliest ages the worship of generative energy was of the most simple and artless character, rude in manner, uncouth in form, chaste in idea, the homage of

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man to the Supreme Being, the author of Life, the Sun, as symbolized by the reproductive force. This was seen in the ceremonies of the worship of Astarte, Ishtar and Aphrodite, where the women entered into promiscuous relationship, chiefly at special celebrations. The priestesses of the Babylonian temples were prostitutes, and the same condition obtains to this day in Morocco and parts of India, where great benefits are expected by the worshippers from intercourse with a holy person. But in the whole period of temple prostitution, the priestesses were always treated with great dignity.

The male prostitutes attached to the temples of the Canaanites and mentioned in the Old Testament, during the period of the Hebrew Kings, seem to have had in view the transfer of blessings to the worshippers. They were perhaps the chief reason for the diatribes of the priests of Israel against their neighbours. (It is interesting in this connection to note that the French word *bougre* comes from the Latin *Bulgaris*, originally applied to a set of heretics who came to France from Bulgaria in the 11th Century, and who were believed to be homosexuals). Society, with the exception of the Jews, did not frown on ritual prostitution till it became an excuse for all kinds of debauched ceremonies, such as the festivals of Bacchus.

Among primordial people the standard of pre-nuptial chastity in a tribe was not necessarily proportionate to the degree of culture, but, on the contrary, in the lowest tribes virginity was more respected than in the higher. Sex irregularity was not regarded as a moral offence only. The whole people were involved in disaster by blighting the fruits of the earth and the increase of their flocks, and hence the rigorous punishment of India, where, by the laws of Manu, the culprit was burned to death on a red hot iron bed; or of Babylon, by the code of Hammurabi, he (or she) was strangled and thrown into the river. It is difficult to understand such severe punishments unless the nation feared for its own safety.

In many so-called savage tribes the fundamental laws governing marriage and the relations of the sexes are much the same as with Europeans, but with this difference, that the sexual prohibitions are far more numerous, the horror excited by breaches of them far deeper, and the punishments inflicted much sterner. It would therefore seem that gross superstition, such as taboo, may sometimes be of benefit in the preservation of the race. The Hebrews forbade fornication to women but not to men (Lev. 19, 29; Deut. 22, 18). The action of Judah towards Tamar, his sister-in-law, who disguised herself as a harlot, appears in the biblical account to be most natural, and Judah was afterwards highly praised (Gen. 49, 8). Confucianism, Mohammedanism, the Hindoos, and the Zoroastrians

tolerated a "double standard" of sex morals, while in Greece a certain class of courtesans, the *hetairæ*, occupied a remarkably high position in social life. The geisha of Japan today occupies a position in society comparable to the European actress, with her free artistic existence. But the Greeks, while honouring chastity in women, had no prohibitions for the other sex. "We keep mistresses for our pleasure", says Demosthenes (*In Neacram*), "concubines for constant attendance, and wives to bear us legitimate children and to be faithful housekeepers". Rome also paid homage to virginity, and strict laws forbade "respectable" men to marry prostitutes. The romance thrown over the chivalry of the middle ages seemed to place chastity on a pedestal, but the history of the crusades with their hordes of female camp followers shows this to be far from the truth.

Marriage by purchase raised the standard of female chastity and, to some extent, checked the incontinence of men, who, by demanding that their prospective wives should be virgins, indirectly gave rise to the demand that they themselves should refrain from intercourse with unmarried girls, because of the offence to the family. But, even in our day, in the midst of civilization, public opinion turns against the dishonoured rather than the dishonourer.

Voluntary abstinence is almost unheard of in a state of nature, and is extremely rare in savage races, either in men or women, and early marriage is the rule. This is true also of the Chinese, Japanese, and the ancient Hebrews. In Europe, where the adult women outnumber the men, 3 to 4 per cent are doomed to a single life on account of our obligatory monogamy. The chief cause of celibacy at the present time is the difficulty of supporting a family in modern society, a condition which was brought about as we changed from an agricultural to an industrial community.

Celibacy is also a religious ordinance, as seen among the priests of the Buddhists, Thibetans and the Church of Rome, the latter probably inspired by the teaching of St. Paul. St. Augustine wrote "The unmarried children shall shine in heaven as beaming stars, while their parents will look like dull ones"; and St. Jerome, "Though marriage fills the earth, it is virginity that replenishes heaven". Thomas Aquinas thought that carnal desire is the real root of all sinfulness. Following these ecclesiastical doctrines "the cardinal virtue of the religious type became the absolute suppression of the whole sensual side of our nature, and theology made the indulgence of one passion almost the sole unchristian sin" (Lecky). Enforced celibacy of persons devoted to religion depends upon the notion that sexual intercourse is impure. But the celibacy of the clergy was not universal in Europe till the end of the 13th century, and was later discarded by the Greek church and by Luther.

No consideration of prostitution would be complete without a survey of marriage, which is not by any means a human institution. In animals mating occurs as the culminating act of courtship, and with this the female conceives. The rut is over and the sexual attractiveness of the female for other males ceases. In birds and mammals the male remains attached to her and constitutes animal marriage such as we have in apes, foxes and wild geese. The innate elements are a mutual attachment and a tendency for the male to remain with his consort, to guard, assist, protect and nourish. This new phase of life constitutes a new type of behaviour—the matrimonial response in contrast to the sexual impulse.

In man, the supersimian ape, the nature of the matrimonial bonds is entirely different. The act of sexual union does not constitute marriage. A special form of ceremonial sanction is necessary—a special creative act of culture, a hallmark which establishes a new relation between two individuals, something over and above the biological bond. As long as the creative act has not been performed, as long as marriage has not been concluded in its cultural form, a man and woman can mate and cohabit as long as they like, and their relation remains something entirely different from a socially sanctioned marriage. Their tie is not biologically safeguarded, nor is it enforced by public opinion. A new force therefore, a new element, comes into play, supplementing the mere instinctive regulation of animals—the actual interference of society. Once this approbation has been obtained, they must fulfil the numerous physiological, economical, religious and domestic obligations which are involved in this new human relationship.

In higher mammals, marriage of some form is necessary because the longer the pregnancy, the more helpless the pregnant female and the new-born infant, the more necessary is male protection. This mating varies in duration. In many birds it lasts for life, and Brehm thinks that genuine marriage is found only among birds. In mammals marriage is rarely for more than one season, except in man and apes.

There is a tradition of monogamy in almost every race. Some powerful deity, as Menes in Egypt or Kekrops in ancient Greece, directly intervened, or some powerful and all-wise ruler, often legendary, formulated laws for the guidance of his people, who had already found the inconvenience of promiscuity. The highest monkeys are probably monogamous, although we know surprisingly little of their habits of life in the feral state. In the human race, untouched by civilization, the family is a universal institution; to the mother belongs the immediate care of the children, while the father is the guardian and provider.

Marriage in Europe was a civil contract till the Council of Trent (1563) compelled an ecclesiastical blessing for it, made it a sacrament of the church and an essential religious ceremony. Luther held that matrimony belonged to the jurists only, but the Protestant church still continued to look upon it as a divine institution. During the French Revolution marriage was declared an obligatory, civil action to which sacerdotal benediction was permissible. This wise legislation has been copied by many other countries but in some parts of the world (Ontario *e.g.*) civil marriage is still illegal and impossible.

When man passed from the "hunter" stage of his development to the agricultural phase, he found one wife hardly sufficient. With the less hazardous occupation of a shepherd and a tiller of the soil he needed more helping hands, and so he accepted the doctrine that large families were pleasing to God, and its corollary of polygamy. Thus we find the Jews with many wives striving to fulfil the teaching of Moses—"Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth". Although the New Testament demands one husband of one wife, yet the Koran allows four wives and concubines, *quantum sufficit*. Concubinage thus became a second kind of marriage, thoroughly honourable, and remained in a qualified form down to recent times as morganatic marriage, a tolerated perquisite of royalty. The Mormons still regard polygamy as a divine institution, but because of legal difficulties they no longer practise it.

During the last decade, a new solution to the difficulties of monogamy has been offered under the name of companionate marriage which has the advantage of concubinage in being easily terminated.

In the gradual evolution of the family on a patriarchal basis the woman belonged first to her father, who guarded her carefully till her husband appeared, when he in turn looked after her with the same care. This situation resulted in the existence of a large body of young men who were not rich enough to support a wife, and to an equal or larger number of women who had no chance in the matrimonial market. At such a point in social evolution, prostitution becomes the inevitable complement of existing legal monogamy. But the harlot was something more than a channel to drain off superfluous sex energy, and her attraction by no means ceased when men were married, for it has often been noted that the majority of men who visit brothels are not single. The motive is not one of uncomplicated lust, nor is it always a sign that monogamous marriage has been a failure. Pepys, married to a young and charming wife, cannot resist the temptation to seek the fleeting favours of other women. The impulse comes over him at intervals and he is unable to withstand. These

details of his intimate life are brought out with incomparable simplicity in his diary, probably because he is setting them down for his own eyes alone.

Coming more closely to a chronological study of prostitution, we find reference to it in Herodotus and in the Old Testament. "When Judah saw her (Tamar), he thought her to be a harlot, because she had covered her face" (Gen. 39, 15). Joshua's spies lodged with Rahab the harlot who hid them from the men of Jericho, on the roof, and afterwards let them down with a cord over the wall. She and her family were saved at the sacking of the city. Jephthah, the son of a harlot by Gilead, was cast out by Gilead's legitimate sons, but afterwards became a leader in Israel. Samson loved a woman in the valley of Sorek, whose name was Delilah. In the seventh chapter of Proverbs is a description of a prostitute, and a little later Ezekiel likens Jerusalem to a whore. The Hebrew code, however, was extremely severe on Jewish maidens who gave themselves to prostitution but tolerated the offence in "strange women".

The establishment of the first public brothel is attributed to Solon. The Greek *hetairæ* (companions) included slaves and other low-class women as well as some of the upper ranks, many of whom were admired and respected for their mental and social talents.

The coarse, vigorous, practical Romans were quite ready to tolerate the prostitute, but were not prepared to carry this toleration to its logical result. Even Cicero, a moralist of no mean order, said (*Pro Cælio*) "If there be any one who thinks that youth is to be wholly interdicted from amours with courtesans, he certainly is very strict indeed". The wife of Justinian was a reformed bawd and Messalina, wife of Claudius, one of the most debased women of history. The superior prostitutes had immense influence and, like their Parisian successors of today, set their seal on the fashions of hair, dress and jewellery. Rome encouraged brothels but men entered them with covered head. The common harlot was treated with contempt, compelled to dye her hair or wear a wig, to clothe herself in garments which made her profession easily recognizable, and to live in cellars (fornices). But in spite of this attitude, prenuptial unchastity was scarcely censured by public opinion. Later the leading fathers of the church were inclined to tolerate prostitution and Christian emperors derived a tax from brothels. But Theodosius and Valentinian, seeking to repress it, ordered all panders to be exiled.

Theodoric (Visigoth), Charlemagne and Frederick Barbarossa made severe laws with frightful punishments. In France, as early as 1254, Louis Ninth (afterwards Saint) ordered all courtesans to be driven out of the country, and deprived of their money, goods and even

clothes. When he set out for the Crusades (1269) he destroyed all brothels, with the result that prostitutes mixed more freely than ever with the general population and their baneful influence was greatly increased. Even in his own camp, his edicts seemed to encourage the number of loose women.

The last wholesale attempt to uproot prostitution in Europe was that of Maria Theresa at Vienna in 1751, when she imposed fines, imprisonment, whipping and torture for violations of the prohibitory laws. She even went so far as to interdict the wearing of short dresses, and to remove all female servants from public houses and restaurants. In the 14th century, some European countries, England included, compelled lewd women to wear a special costume to proclaim their infamy.

On the other hand, among primitive people, living in a state of nature and untouched by foreign influence and "higher culture", prostitution is almost unknown. It was unheard of among the Cymri (Wales), and came to the Burmese and other allied people only with the introduction of so-called civilization. It was never a social question in Islam during the first centuries after the Prophet's time, and Mahomet severely condemned it. Captain Cook on his voyage to New Zealand found "the women were not impregnable, but the terms and manner of compliance were as decent as those in marriage among us". Segelman, who lived for many years in the Sudan, says that "with the institution of European rule there has been a weakening of the sanctions enforcing chastity" (1932).

In the more recent attempts at regulation of this wide-spread evil we find the first efforts were made by the church. But the platitudes of a thousand pulpits were of no avail, and so the towns took the matter in hand. Some municipalities, such as Hamburg, Vienna and Augsburg, built public brothels and leased them to managers, a system of regulation that continued for three centuries. But when the great pandemic of syphilis swept over Europe in the 16th century these mediæval brothels were closed.

Sooner or later the prostitute became a public health problem and was handled by segregation into "red-light" districts. At the end of the 17th century medical examination was required, perhaps first in Paris, where the loose women were registered, wore a distinct dress with a badge, and lived in a licensed brothel.

Under the title of the "Fable of the Bees", Bernard Mandeville in 1724 wrote a modest defense of public stews, "for" he said "the encouraging of public whoring will not only prevent most of the mischievous effects of the vice, but even lessen the quantity of whoring in general and reduce it to the narrowest bounds which it can possibly be contained in".

This was perhaps the first attempt to approach the question from a social and scientific viewpoint, bereft of all hypocrisy and cant. Eighty years later, Napoleon established the system of *maisons de tolerance* which had such a great influence upon the rest of the world. That they were satisfactory in some measure may be judged from the fact that they are still in operation in the country in which they originated.

Much thought has been given to the question of the mentality of courtesans, but there seems to be no common factor. In the first place, a great many of them would be classified as pathological liars who garnish the sad tale of their downfall with a romance which would do credit to Munchausen. Poverty has comparatively little to do with their initiation, for prostitution increases regularly with wealth, and no raising of wages can abolish it. Domestic servants, who have a fairly sheltered life, furnish the most recruits. The mental characteristics which are most common are indolence and the love of luxury, including fine clothes. Passion does not seem to play as large a part as is usually supposed, for some world-famous demi-mondes have confessed they were devoid of it. Once firmly established in this life, few of them seem anxious to change their occupation, and there has always been difficulty, in America at least, in finding girls for the philanthropic "Rescue Homes". It would thus appear that there is no formula of algebraic brevity which will fit the case. Prostitution is only seldom a permanent employment. More often it is a transitory stage, for some of them marry well and make good wives.

Out of all the discussion centuries old, comes the unanimous and international antagonism towards the brothel. On the one hand, the prostitute is disinclined to enter into slavery, and, on the other, her client feels it is part of the fascination of prostitution under civilized conditions that he shall enjoy a freedom and choice the brothel cannot provide. The transformation of the cloistered bawdy-house into free prostitution is approved by many social reformers in the cause of morality. This would decrease racketeering, which has made vice its leading money-maker and prostitution a corporate business, in which every madame, by intimidation or physical violence, pays a percentage of her earnings to the ring, which maintains an interlocking system of executives, lawyers, and I am sorry to add, doctors. Legalized prostitution, in America at least, has led to police corruption and graft on a colossal scale. At the present time the racketeers have a firm grip. Vice commissions have shown that financial interests of third parties are a big factor in the flourishing of commercial prostitution.

Absolute suppression may be possible in an agricultural community where the drive is

aided by gossip and a powerful religious morality. Those who favour it in urban industrial civilization close their eyes to history. "But", they argue, "it is the ideal. Centuries of legislation have not suppressed thievery, but we are still attempting to stamp it out". On the other hand there are those who hold that prostitution is no more dangerous to society than the wearing of a red tie with a dress shirt. Participation in one affair, as in the other, is purely a matter of taste. It is a civil crime only when it subtends actual violations of the criminal code, such as blackmail or the spreading of venereal disease. The common attitude towards it is based on canon law rather than common law. It treats as a crime against the state an act that is essentially a matter of an individual's adjustment to society. "And yet it is an evil we are bound to have with us as long as celibacy is a custom and monogamy a law" (Godfrey, Science of Sex).

There have, however, been methods of control which by their results must be considered effective, as far as venereal disease is concerned. In the punitive expedition which General Pershing conducted into Mexico in 1916 the courtesans were kept in a stockade and all male visitors were compelled to emerge through prophylactic stations. In the A.E.F. in France, prophylactic depots were established in every troop centre. In some places a general order required each soldier returning to cantonment after a given hour to take treatment, whether he required it or not. The result of this method of regulation was that there was less disablement from venereal disease in the large army in France than there was in the small army in Cuba in 1898.

The methods of doing away with segregated areas have not always been humane or wise. In 1860 the Mayor of Portsmouth, hard pressed by many "uplifters", turned out into the streets all the prostitutes, to the number of three or four hundred. At the end of three days the condition of the city was so bad that he allowed them to return to their former premises. Practically the same episodes were repeated in Pittsburg and in New York in 1891. The methods of the last half of the nineteenth century were no more successful than those of Louis IX and Maria Theresa.

Some of the nations at the present time which still license prostitution are: Argentine, Belgium, Egypt, France, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Portugal and Spain. But Anglo-Saxon countries have never been satisfied with this solution. In 1864 England passed the Contagious Diseases Act, requiring the periodic examination of all prostitutes in naval and military districts. Although the incidence of venereal diseases by this enactment had been reduced to the average of other European armies, public opinion was so strongly against it that a commission was appointed in 1882. The majority reported

favourably, but, nevertheless, the bill was repealed in 1884. By 1890, the British army had again the highest incidence of syphilis among the great nations. Then the regulations were put into force once more in India, by army orders rather than by Parliament, and again syphilis dropped to the average or better. In New Orleans the Story ordinances were in operation for 20 years. St. Louis tried a similar plan of regulation in 1870 but abandoned it four years later because of the graft and dishonesty of those concerned in its administration. In New York, Gottheil found this measure of control "neither desirable nor successful". In 1885 Rotterdam, with regulation, had more prostitution and venereal disease than Amsterdam, a city without regulation. In 1906 Denmark abandoned regulation.

The time has gone by when an ecclesiastic blessing can really sanctify what is base and transform lust and greed into the sincerity of sexual affection. Either the prostitute wife must come under the moral ban, or there must be an end to the complete ostracism under which the prostitute labours. She is still separated by a great gulf from her married sister and even from a concubine. For thousands of years prostitution has been defended because the courtesan is necessary to insure the purity of women. Today in a democratic age it begins to be realized that prostitutes are women. She is, as Marro says, "the buttress of our marriage system. The only difference is in the price and duration of the contract. By marriage, morality may be outraged with impunity, providing law and religion are invoked." Christian censure has always been strong and in the Penitentials sins of unchastity were the favourite topic. But always there has been a considerable discrepancy between Christian doctrine and public opinion. Christianity has done little more than establish a standard, which, though accepted perhaps in theory, is hardly recognized by the

large majority of people—or at least of men—in Christian communities, and has introduced the vice of hypocrisy which apparently was little known in sexual matters by pagan antiquity (Westermarck). At the present time there is a tendency for its elevation, in association with the growing humanity and refinement of civilization, leading to the slow elimination of prostitution by the higher and purer method of sexual relationship freed from pecuniary considerations. This can only be achieved when we purge ourselves of the clinging tradition that there is any impurity or dishonour in acts of love for which the reasonable and not merely conventional conditions have been fulfilled. It is love which makes marriage legal, not marriage which legalizes love. Although social workers and Vice Commissions have repeatedly recommended that prostitution be no longer considered a crime, the problem is today in the same position as at any time during the last three thousand years, except in Russia, where it has been practically eliminated.

George Meredith has a story which well exemplifies our modern hypocritical attitude. A Moslem Caliph was royally entertained at a banquet in London, where he met some of the great men and women of England. Walking home to his hotel through the Haymarket, he was accosted several times by women of the street. "Your Christian civilization" said he to his host "has a magnificent front, but a hideous posterior".

Prostitution, even at its best, is a real evil, a melancholy and sordid travesty of sincere and natural passionate relationship. "What else are these women" asks Schopenhauer "than human sacrifices on the altar of monogamy—sacrifices rendered inevitable by the very nature of monogamic institution?" And so the prostitute "remains, while civilizations rise and fall, the eternal priestess of humanity, blasted for the sins of the people" (Lecky).

Medical Economics

SOCIAL SCIENTISTS IN THE MEDICAL FIELD

In many writings on medical economics one sees frequently the assertion that physicians know nothing about economics, finance, or similar matters involved in new methods of distributing medical care. They are told that these are problems for economists and sociologists. Some self-certified "experts" in the social sciences testify before state and national legislative bodies, conduct extensive "research projects" and fill the periodical press and the pamphlets of foundations with advice, criticisms and proposals concerning medical care. The medical profession has a right to survey the

credentials of such advisers. Before a physician is called for consultation in the critical stages of any disease, his experience, clinically and in research, is generally known and usually his results have been submitted for consideration and criticism in meetings with professional colleagues. The economist or sociologist who presses his advice on the public should show similar credentials. Has he received the fundamental training adequate to give his opinion value? Has he applied this training to the special problems of social relations in the medical field? It is a revelation to examine the credentials and the training of the most vociferous "experts" who launch propaganda in the field of medical care. A study of the literature of